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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000788

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2024  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: KURDISH PRESS IN POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 623  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 514  
[1](#)C. 08 BAGHDAD 3836

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) internal power-sharing negotiations (Ref A, B, C) have generated a plethora of wildly inconsistent press reports about upcoming KRG elections as well as the negotiations themselves. Parliamentary recess combined with Kurdish New Year's and leadership travel schedules have most Kurdish politicians outside Baghdad and Iraq, unable to confirm or deny these rumors. Knowing who owns these press outlets, and their political links, however, provides a glimpse into how Kurdish politicians use disinformation to influence political negotiations. While the Kurdish print press is often inaccurate and most newspapers have political patrons, the end result is a clash of political opinions and criticism of politicians from all sides that acts as some counter to the duolithic power of the KDP and PUK. End Summary.

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DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The press has been relentless in their coverage of PUK power negotiations and upcoming KRG elections. On March 10, Rudaw reported that Talabani offered Nawshirwan Mustafa six PUK seats in the upcoming elections. On March 11, Rozhnama reported that KDP's Election Chief Jafaar Ibrahim announced that KDP and PUK would field separate open candidate lists. On March 15, Hawlati newspaper reported that former KDP Politburo Secretary Jawhar Namiq intends to field a independent list for the upcoming KRG elections and then form an alliance with Nawshirwan Mutafa's list. That same day, Lvin magazine printed that the Iranain government is not happy about former PUK Deputy General Secretary Nawshirwan Mustafa's decision to field an independent list because it may harm Iran's interests. None of these stories are true, according to our Kurdish contacts.

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WHERE HAVE ALL THE KURDS GONE?  
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[1](#)3. (C) Getting information about internal Kurdish political deliberations has become noticeably more difficult. Temporarily, both PUK and KDP parliamentarians made use of their month vacation and flew north to celebrate Kurdish New Year "NawRuz." PUK leaders Barham Saleh and Jalal Talabani are finally back in Baghdad, at least temporarily but they often go back and forth to Sulaymania to contain the PUK leadership crisis. On the KDP side, Masoud Barzani has been on a month-long European tour. On a more permanent basis, Senior KDP Representative Rowsch Shaways has been recuperating from surgery in Germany for over five months and KRG Representative Dilshad Miran was permanently recalled to

Erbil (after a sex scandal) and replaced by Article 140 Minister Mohamed Ishan who spends most of his time in Erbil and Kirkuk. Cell phones are switched off and the e-mails remain unanswered. Only Foreign Minister Zebari could reasonably enunciate KDP thinking, and he is frequently out of Baghdad and has terrible relations with the Prime Minister in any case.

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POLITICAL TACTICS  
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14. (C) Having spent days tracking politicians down to dispel above press claims, editor of Baghdad-based Arabic language Kurdish newspaper, Ataahki, Jalil al-Dalany on March 16 asserted to us that it is commonplace for Kurdish politicians to make use of the media to evoke speculation and Qpoliticians to make use of the media to evoke speculation and rumor about opponents. He claimed that Nawshirwan purposely leaked false information about his negotiations with Talabani to make Talabani appear unyielding and then disadvantaged. On March 15, Talabani's Advisor Aram Yarwessi told PolOff that, "In Kurdish politics everything is negotiable. It's like a carpet sale. You need to keep your opponent distracted (with pressure from the press and some lemon tea), start big, and take your time so you can end exactly where you want." Yarwessi elaborated that earlier press stories of VP Korat Rasoul's resignation from PUK due to a loss of faith in Talabani put Kosrat on the defensive and forced him to come to the aid of Talabani against Nawshirwan. Talabani's designating Kosrat to negotiate with Nawshirwan, Yarwessi explained, keeps Talabani's two opponents distracted with each other.

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15. (C) Not all press stories are false. The March 15 edition of Talabani's Kurdistan Nwe truthfully reported that Talabani met with a KDP delegation to discuss the PUK-KDP accord. Indeed KDP Politburo Head Fadhil Merani confirmed to RRTOff that the meeting had taken place, the PUK-KDP accord would remain intact and any seats that Nawshirwan wins would be a subset of PUK's. PUK's Aso newspaper report that Jalal Talabani said he would not seek re-election as Iraq's president but would continue as PUK General Secretary were confirmed by PUK KRG Public Relations Officer Sadi Pire on March 17. Talabani's statement that he may not seek re-election works for Talabani five ways. According to Pire, by showing this card early, Talabani finds out exactly who inside the PUK seeks the presidency. In addition, it quells the ambitions of those PUK leaders who are actively maneuvering to become the next PUK General Secretary. It may also reveal if the Sunni Arabs are serious about taking the Iraqi Presidency and may open up early negotiations on ministries they might be willing to trade. It can also work like a public poll, allowing time for the public to rally behind his candidacy. In 2005, Talabani issued a similar statement. Popular debate ensued. Bowing to "public demand," at the time, Talabani could not refuse and re-stated his candidacy.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) This latest spate of Kurdish press stories reveal how complex Kurdish political negotiations can be. At a time of heightened Arab-Kurd tensions, it also reveals how few Kurds there are in Baghdad, especially KDP Kurds who can represent KRG President Masoud Barzani in negotiations with Maliki and the central government.

BUTENIS